

## The Problem of Rape in Papua New Guinea: An Exploration of Conflicting Understandings

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### Abstract

There is a tendency in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for rape victims to be blamed for the offence. Statements made by the police on the increasing rate of rape often borders on stereotyping of the victims and portrays a misguided understanding of the factors that perpetuate rape. The main objective in this paper is to argue that in PNG, there is a felt need for the contextualization and understanding of rape as a social problem rather than a problem based on a particular victim's inadequacies. It is only by doing so can we better comprehend the socio-cultural factors that make rape possible.

**Key words:** rape, social problem, victims, vulnerable, culturally accepted violence, socio-cultural factors

### Introduction

Rape in Papua New Guinea is an existential problem. As part of our discussions on rape in the unit Social and Ethical Issues,<sup>1</sup> I have always asked the female students whether they see themselves as potential rape victims. The answer has always been an overwhelming 'yes'. Asked whether they consider their male classmates as potential perpetrators, they have always answered in the affirmative. They emphasize that the possibility that it could happen is always in their consciousness. This is in line with Bradley's assertion about rape in PNG that 'rape and gang-rape have reached the point where many women live in fear'.<sup>2</sup> Recently, there has been an ever growing concern about the problem of rape in the media. The general public, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), churches, parliamentarians and more especially the police have all been genuinely concerned about the increasing rate of rape in the country.

However, even in spite of the somewhat general concern and opprobrium about the prevalence of the problem, there is a conflict in the understanding of the social nature of rape. Some of the institutional actors like the police in accordance with their own ideology, self-interest and knowledge (or lack of it)

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The author is very grateful for the generous assistance of Anja Fischer in designing the data collection instruments amongst other things.

<sup>1</sup> Divine Word University (DWU) as part of its integral approach to education made it mandatory for all the students to study the two units Christian Ethics and Social & Ethical Issues. These are offered in the first year of studies.

<sup>2</sup> Bradley, C. (2001), *Family and Sexual Violence in PNG: An Integrated Long-Term Strategy*, Discussion Paper No. 84, Institute of National Affairs, Port Moresby, p. 1

tend toward blaming the victims rather than the system that makes rape possible. Thus, there is an apparent misunderstanding of how the problem of rape in PNG is to be diagnosed and responded to. Wrong diagnoses often lead to wrong solutions and the continuation of the problem.

This article therefore tries to argue that the police in their statements inadvertently see rape as a personal problem. I will begin by exploring a broad range of views on the increasing rate of rape in the country. I will then critically analyze the views expressed by the police on rape, before trying to contextualize rape as a social problem. The importance of this study cannot be over-emphasized in the area of rape prevention. The way a particular problem is understood inevitably helps towards its solution. The police are at the centre of crime prevention and prosecution and proper policing involve not just reactive behaviour but more importantly proactive actions. In the case of rape, prevention is better than cure. But that can only happen with a good understanding of the factors involved.

### **The social perception of the problem of rape in PNG**

Almost everyday, the two national newspapers – The National and the Post Courier – deliver harrowing stories of rape that indicate that the phenomenon has become pervasive, prevalent and systemic. Worried by the rampart increase in rape cases in the country, *The National* in its opinion column writes that:

The incidence of rape throughout Papua New Guinea is reaching new heights. That is a savage indictment of our society, of the way in which our men view our women. Rape is fast reaching the point where it is becoming a tolerated, if not accepted social norm in some parts of the country. In other areas where the crime has been virtually unknown, rape now occurs at an increasingly frequent rate.<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, Matthias Sapuri<sup>4</sup> adds that on a daily basis, two women on average are admitted at the Port Moresby General Hospital (POMGH) for rape-related problems. Comparing the increasing rate of rape now to how it was 20 years ago when he was a medical student, he said that ‘only one rape victim was treated at the Port Moresby General Hospital every six months. The hospital is now treating an average of two rape victims everyday’.<sup>5</sup> In the first six months of 2006, at the POMGH, up to 400 women complained to doctors about sexual assault and rape.<sup>6</sup> The same sentiments were expressed in a report by the Government of Papua New Guinea that:

Young women all over the country are at high risk of rape, gang rape and other form of violent sexual assault and the attendant fear

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<sup>3</sup> *The National*, 17 October 2005, ‘Worse than murder’, p. 18

<sup>4</sup> Matthias Sapuri is the Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Papua New Guinea.

<sup>5</sup> Winis Map, 2005, ‘Two Raped everyday’, *The National*, 13 October, p. 5

<sup>6</sup> Noel Pascoe, 2006, ‘Are Rape victims ignored?’ *Post Courier*, 7 July, p. 3

accompanies them in many aspects of their daily life in urban and rural settings. It severely limits their rights to freedom and to assembly and their right to participate equally alongside young men in all forms of social, political and economic life.<sup>7</sup>

In a study by the Government of PNG and UNICEF in 1996 on the situation of women and children it was concluded that 'the pervasiveness of gang rape as a form of criminal activity has become a major threat to social stability and the security of women and families throughout PNG'.<sup>8</sup>

In their own report, The Office of National Planning reported a staggering average incidence of 110 rapes and other sexual offences against women for every 100, 000 females aged 15 and over in the population in 1997.<sup>9</sup> The highest statistic was 480 rapes and other sexual offences against women in the National Capital District per 100, 000 females<sup>10</sup>.

Approximately 60 per cent of the men interviewed in a 1994 study said that they had participated in group rape. The same study found that 55 per cent of the women interviewed reported having had the experience of being forced to have sex against their will.<sup>11</sup>

Sir Paulias Matane<sup>12</sup> in noting the increasing menace of rape advocated for a holistic and integrated approach in dealing with the cankerworm as it is 'no longer just the victim's problem or the problem of the victim's family, but a national problem ... destroying society ... and discouraging foreigners from investing in the country'.<sup>13</sup>

Even the parliamentarians are also concerned about the scourge. Responding to questions in the House of Parliament, Carol Kidu<sup>14</sup> expressed her dismay at the recent increase in the level of rapes, pack-rapes and sexual abuse in the country. She enjoined men to 'speak up against rape and sexual violence because it is becoming a major social issue that must be addressed collectively'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *Committee on the Rights of the Child*, 2003, 'Considerations of Reports submitted by State Parties under Article 44 of the Convention – Papua New Guinea', UN Doc. CRC/C/28/Add. 20, 21 July, para. 172.

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF Papua New Guinea, 1996, *Children, Women and Families in Papua New Guinea: A Situation Analysis*. Port Moresby: Government of PNG, p. 144

<sup>9</sup> Office of National Planning, 1998, *Papua New Guinea Human Development Report*. Port Moresby, Government of Papua New Guinea, p. 138

<sup>10</sup> Jeline Giris and Teresia Rynkiewicz, 2005, *Emerging Issues for Women and Children in Papua New Guinea*, Goroka: The Melanesian Institute for Pastoral and Socio-economic Service, Inc., p. 21.

<sup>11</sup> National Sex and Reproduction Research Team and Carol Jenkins, 1994. *National Study of Sexual and Reproductive Behaviour in Papua New Guinea*. Goroka: PNG Institute of Medical Research, Monograph No. 10 p, 102

<sup>12</sup> Sir Paulias Matane (Grand Chief) is the Governor-General of PNG

<sup>13</sup> *The National*, 30 March, 2006, 'Rape a national problem – G.G.' p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Dame Carol Kidu is the Minister for Social Development, Youths and Sports in PNG

<sup>15</sup> *The National*, 22 February, 2006, 'PNG a sick society: Baing', p. 1.

Carol Kidu's statement came in response to questions in the house of parliament from another parliamentarian who in noting the alarming increase in rapes, incest and sexual abuse of children 'pointed out that there was a clear breakdown of the social fabric of our society'.<sup>16</sup> This imputation of guilt on the society is also taken up by Michael Unage<sup>17</sup> who claims that our society today is bedeviled by an escalation of physical, sexual and psychological violence on women, and therefore noted that 'the innumerable forms of violence against women in the country reflect the kind of perception we have about women'.<sup>18</sup>

According to UNICEF, 'rape and sexual assault have reached epidemic levels, but the vast majority of cases are not reported.'<sup>19</sup> It noted that the problem of rape in PNG now constitutes a big impediment to social cohesion and economic advancement as it limits the active participation of women in national life. Amnesty International observes that

Sexual violence has become such a common occurrence in parts of the country that fear of rape and gang rape severely circumscribes the freedom of movement of women and girls.<sup>20</sup>

The Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands noted in their statement on rape that 'this is a very serious problem that needs to be strongly addressed'.<sup>21</sup> To drastically checkmate the problem Mark Sevu (a National Court judge) advocates severe sentencing.<sup>22</sup> From the foregoing above, it is obvious that rape has been recognized as a big threat not just to the women but to the entire society: 'Rape is indeed a crime against humanity, not merely a crime against a particular woman.'<sup>23</sup>

However, sentiments expressed by the police – an institutional actor most directly involved in combating the crime – show a different kind of tone and understanding. On the one hand, their sense of angst is obvious, yet their statements either explicitly or implicitly portray an attitude of blame for the victims.

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.1

<sup>17</sup> Michael Unage is a well known social commentator in PNG

<sup>18</sup> Michael Unage, 2005, 'Dealing with violence against women', *The National*, 10 March, p. 17.

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, Papua New Guinea, (see note 4, p.4)

<sup>20</sup> Amnesty International Papua New Guinea, 2006, *Violence Against Women: Not Inevitable, Never Acceptable*, p. 16

<sup>21</sup> The Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, 1999 'Statement on the Problem of Rape', AGM.

<sup>22</sup> Romulus Masiu, 2006, '30 years for rapist', *The National*, 31 July, p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Larry May & Robert Strikwerda, 1994, 'Men in Groups: Collective Responsibility for Rape', in <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810174> (Accessed 28/04/2008 01:54).

## **Evidence of attribution in verbal statements by the police**

Here, using the two national daily newspapers as the primary source of information, we shall explore the verbal statements of the police in the context in which they are reported with regard to the occurrence of rape. I shall then offer some interpretations of the meanings of their statements based not just on the actual semantics of the statements made by the police in different contexts, but also its relation to every day, commonsense lived experiences and their weight as casual factors in rape. To do this, I shall present some actual examples of the reported statements from the dailies from which we evaluated the meanings and inferred the attribution processes. However, I will begin by looking briefly at the concept of attribution to help us understand our analysis.

### **What do we mean by attribution?**

Sociologists and psychological social psychologists use the concept of attribution to help us make sense of human behaviour and comprehend the essential factors that influence how people apportion responsibility when events occur. Attribution theory is therefore the 'study of the causal interpretations that persons give to events in their environment'<sup>24</sup>, 'a judgment about audience perceptions of why an act of wrongdoing occurred, rather than causal perceptions of the act per se'.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, the focus here, from the perspective of the audience, observer or the interpreter, is not often on causality - what caused a particular event - but rather, the contributions made by the victims or actors in allowing it to happen. The emphasis therefore is on the victim or the actors, rather than on the system – the social and environmental contexts that made the event possible. Thus, 'attribution is a process that begins with social perception, progresses through causal judgment and social inference, and ends with behavioural consequences'.<sup>26</sup>

Intuitively, human beings are always trying to understand their own as well as others' behaviour and often, their interpretations shape and condition their responses to events and behaviour. Essentially, when an event occurs, intuitively, people gather information and then use it to form a causal judgment for that event and explain behaviours of actors involved. By so doing they apportion blame and responsibility on actors regardless of the observable causes of the event.

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<sup>24</sup> Kathleen S. Crittenden, 'Sociological Aspects of Attribution', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), p. 425 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810174> (accessed 04/08/2009 00:12)

<sup>25</sup> Jeannine A. Gailey and Matthew T. Lee, 'An Integrated Model of Attribution of Responsibility for Wrongdoing in Organizations', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 68, No.4 (Dec. 2005) p.338 from Jstor

<sup>26</sup> Kathleen S. Crittenden, 'Sociological Aspects of Attribution', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 9 (1983), p. 426 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810174> (accessed 04/08/2009 00:12)

This concept is important for us in our analysis of the statements of the police with regard to rape.

### **Police and causal attribution of rape**

The two national dailies – *The National* and the *Post Courier* – are replete with stories of warnings by numerous provincial police commanders (PPC) about the escalating incidents of rapes in the country. For instance, in Western Highlands Province, the Provincial Police Commander, Theodore Muriki, while noting the escalating incidents of sexual attacks on minors in the province, nonetheless issued a warning to parents and guardians ‘to be cautious and alert ... as many school girls were being targeted by adult males.’<sup>27</sup> As a way of dealing with the problem, he made an appeal ‘to parents not to leave their young daughters alone in the house or in the gardens.’<sup>28</sup>

**Analysis of the evidence of attribution:** It is worrisome to note that his warning came immediately after a 7-year old girl who was alone was dragged into the coffee garden and raped. The worrisome aspect of this warning (for parents to be alert and cautious and not to leave their young daughters alone) is in the sense of attributing the blame on parents for not being cautious and alert and leaving their daughters alone in the house. The home (can be argued) is understandably the safest place to leave a child. Records show that countless women and girls have been raped in various situations and locations irrespective of whether they were alone or not as shown in some of the reports below:

- i. A 13-year-old girl was pack-raped as her mother was forced to watch in their home. The gang tied up the mother and then took turns in raping her young daughter as she watched helplessly.<sup>29</sup>
- ii. A woman was pack-raped right in her house...Police said six suspects confronted the victim and her husband with bush knives. The husband fearing for his life ran away leaving his wife behind. Police said the suspects held the woman captive in her house and repeatedly raped her.<sup>30</sup>
- iii. A police man is on the run after he allegedly raped a minor in Port Moresby. The police officer allegedly raped a 7-year old girl (the daughter of another police officer) in the precincts of the police station.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *The National*, 9 August 2006, ‘Sex attacks irk WHP cops’, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Rosalyn Albianiel, 2004, ‘Mother watches daughter raped’, *Post Courier*, 6 September, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> *The National*, 7 September 2006, ‘Woman raped inside own home’, p.8

<sup>31</sup> Clifford Faiparik, 2005, ‘Cop rapist on minor at large’, *The National*, 2 August, p. 5.

In the first and second instances above, the attribution factor of 'not being alert and cautious and not leaving the victim alone' disappears in the face of the reality of the rapes – they were in the security of their homes. In the third instance, the case of a police man raping a toddler in the police station automatically changes the attribution factor of the parents not being cautious and alert to other factors.

In another instance, Western Highlands Police Chief, Wini Henao, gave a stern warning to young women not to go out at night alone.<sup>32</sup> His counter-part in the Southern Highlands Province, the Acting Provincial Police Commander, Benson Osil, issued a warning 'that women should avoid travelling at night if possible. Otherwise, they should move around in the company of close and trusted relatives.'<sup>33</sup> This warning came after a 19-year old girl was gang-raped to the state of unconsciousness while returning home from a night club.<sup>34</sup>

**Analysis of the evidence of attribution:** In this warning, the police attributed the blame to (i) being out at night and (ii) not being in the company of close relatives. The idea of warning girls and women not to be out at night if possible and to always be in the company of close relatives', flies in the face of the reality of rape in PNG.

- i. A mother was pack-raped in Port Moresby by 10 suspects after breaking into her house on Saturday night. She was with her family when the suspects attacked them.<sup>35</sup>
- ii. A 14-year-old girl was forced out of her house and raped by two men ... the girl and her family were fast asleep when the men broke into the house, dragged her out and raped her.<sup>36</sup>
- iii. A young mother with a 9 month-old baby and three primary school girls were gang-raped by 12 men known to them. The woman and the three girls were in the company of her husband and two other male escorts when they were ambushed.<sup>37</sup>
- iv. Two women were raped ... by a group of men pretending to leave them at home after a night out ...<sup>38</sup>

In the first two instances above, the victims were not out at night. In the third, the victims were with close relatives and in the fourth one, it was the very men that they went out with that eventually raped them in their very home. This

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<sup>32</sup> *The National*, 3 May 2006, 'Cops warn women not to go out alone', p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> *The National*, 19 January 2005, 'Police caution women in SHP about moving around at night', p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> *The National*, 30 March 2005, 'Two-pack raped', p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> *Post Courier*, 6 February 2004, '14-year old raped in Kavieng', p.4.

<sup>37</sup> *The National*, 25 September 2006, 'Young mum and grade 6 girls raped', p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> *Post Courier*, 16 February 2005, 'Women raped', p. 5.

follows the well know fact that ‘more than half of all reported rapes are committed by someone the survivor knows’.<sup>39</sup> In all the instances above, police bias for victim blame is very obvious.

Giossi Labi<sup>40</sup> while acknowledging the increasing rate of rape in the country advised the women folk to arm themselves for protection against rape. He then appealed to parents ‘not to let your daughters travel by themselves anywhere. Make sure that they are accompanied by a male relative or go in a group’.<sup>41</sup>

In Lae, the police Chief Simon Kauba while acknowledging the increasing incidents of rapes, especially in settlements, warned ‘women to be careful when moving around at night or at secluded spots’.<sup>42</sup> Even though he noted that most of victims were raped while walking to the shops or to visit relatives at night, yet he insinuated that ‘women are not taking due care’<sup>43</sup>, that ‘most of the rape incidents occur because the victims are not security conscious’.<sup>44</sup>

As a solution he also advocated that women should ‘avoid going out late at night, especially alone’<sup>45</sup>, ‘to walk with their male companions and avoid isolated bush tracks and other remote spots’<sup>46</sup> and that women should ‘not walk around alone, but if they do, to take every precaution to safeguard themselves’<sup>47</sup> and that ‘girls and women who needed to leave their homes at night must get permission from their parents and be escorted by someone they trusted’.<sup>48</sup>

**Analysis of the evidence of attribution:** Giossi Labi’s advice that women should arm themselves goes against the Port Moresby based Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee which in their widely circulated leaflet, warns women explicitly:

- Do not try to use a dangerous weapon, such as a knife, because the man could take it from you and use it on you.
- Do not fight back if you are attacked by an armed man or by a gang. But you could still make a noise, in case help is near.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Buchwald, E., Fletcher, P.R., & Roth, M. (editors) 2005, *Transforming A Rape Culture*(revised edition), Minnesota: Milkweed Editions p.xi

<sup>40</sup> Giossi Labi, is the Chief of the Border and Coastal Police Command based in Lae, Morobe Province.

<sup>41</sup> Nancy Kalimda, 2006, ‘Top Cop tells girls: Arm themselves’, *Post Courier*, 15 February, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> *Post Courier*, 30 November 2004, ‘Rape in Lae on rise’, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Miva, 2005, ‘Rapes prompt caution from Police Chief’, *The National*, 26 October, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *The National*, 11 October 2005, ‘Police probe rape claim’, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> See, Peter Miva, 2005, *ibid*, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> See, *The National*, 11 October, 2005, p.9.

<sup>47</sup> *The National*, 15 February 2006, ‘Lae’s top cop alarmed over rise in rape cases’, p.4.

<sup>48</sup> Annette Sete, 2006, ‘Top Cop warns women to be careful’, *Post Courier*, 20 September, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee*, ‘Public Information Leaflet No. 6: What to do about Rape’, Port Moresby, NCD pp. 3-4



On the issue of getting permission to be to be out at night, it is hard to see how getting permission or not from one's parents as suggested by the police chief can be a solution to rape. There is basically no established correlation between getting or not getting permission from one's parents and the increasing incidence of rape in the country. The suggestion to avoid going out late at night come from a well-worn cliché and rape myth that girls who go to parties and clubs invariably invite rape upon themselves.

Unfortunately, the majority of women who are raped are raped in the security of their homes. Besides, to tell a particular segment of the population not to go out at night or alone in their own social environment, in their own country, when there is no war, simply because of their gender is an unjustifiable case of gender bias. It is tantamount to imposing a curfew on the women simply because of their gender. Besides, how about those in essential services like female nurses and doctors who because of the call of duty must as a necessity be out at night?

The issue of avoiding isolated bush tracks and other remote spots is hard to accept as a cause as PNG is a lush tropical country with dense vegetation, criss-crossed by a network of bush tracks. For a land area of about 462,840 sq. kilometres, the road network spans only 19,736 km of which only about 6% are paved.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the so-called 'bush tracks' constitute the people's living environment.

The suggestion that women and girls who needed to leave their homes at night should seek the consent of their parents and be escorted by a trusted relative or acquaintance is inadequate as a solution. In most of the cases, it is well known that women and girls are often raped by those who are known and trusted by them – fathers against daughters, grandfathers against granddaughters, security personnel against hapless clients, uncles against nieces, police against citizens, friends, guardians, etc. This is evident in the following reports.

- i. A pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is in court for allegedly raping an under aged girl.<sup>51</sup>
- ii. A reserve policeman allegedly sexually assaulted a six year-old girl inside the...police station. The girl's mother had gone to the police station with her daughter, an elementary two pupil to lay a complaint against her husband over domestic issues...Because the mother needed to buy food for dinner at a nearby trade store – just 10 metres from the police station, she decided to leave her daughter on the bench at the station thinking it was safer there. On coming back, she could not find her daughter. After searching for her around the vicinity, she returned to the police station in time to see her daughter coming out of

<sup>50</sup> See, 'Papua New Guinea: General data' from <http://www.library.uu.nl/wesp/populstat/oceania/papuangg.htm>

<sup>51</sup> *Post Courier*, 6 October 2006, 'Pastor in rape case', p. 4.

one of the offices in the police station. Without suspecting anything, she took her daughter home only to discover that evening that she had been sexually assaulted. The girl then told the mother that the policeman lured her into the office with one kina, then threatened and sexually abused her...A medical report proved that her hymen had been torn and the external areas of her genitals sore and swollen.<sup>52</sup>

The NCD/Central Police Commander, Tony Wagambie, 'also warned females to try to be with a trusted male companion when moving around in public places to discourage ... attacks.'<sup>53</sup> Mr. Wagambie issued the warning after two women were in separate occasions, allegedly raped while on board PMV buses. The PMV drivers and crew members on both cases just watched and did nothing to stop the rapes. It is hard to see how the advice of the police in this case will yield any fruits in stopping rape. People must as a necessity use PMV buses as means of transport and it is practically impossible to be always in the company of 'trusted male companions when moving around' and not that it acts as a deterrent anyway. The inaction of the bus drivers and crew members are perfectly, culturally acceptable ways of dealing with criminality – as long as it does not directly concern them, then, it is fine.

As an example, a woman came across a group of boys gang-raping a young girl and simply passed by; only to later on tell the victim that she could not help her because the rapists were her relatives.<sup>54</sup>

### **Point of departure**

As attitudes and behaviours are socialized, the verbal statements of the police might be a pointer to how those in authority, who have the power to make a difference (policy makers) and the whole society perceive rape. It is important to realize that, though a variety of causal interpretations and analysis of social problems are always possible based on peoples knowledge and vested interests, those in authority, more often than not, have an upper hand in determining the seriousness of any social problem.

According to Ross and Staines, 'the analysis of social problems occurs in a political context'.<sup>55</sup> In other words, they argue that various political stakeholders and agencies have vested political interests in their choice of either individual or systemic attributions. Therefore, because of this partisan nature of analyzing social problems, authorities often tend towards personal attributions – ascribing blame for social problems on individuals rather than on the system - so as not to take the blame and to justify their efforts. In this case,

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<sup>52</sup> Rosalyn Albanie and Abby Yadi, 2006, 'Cop molests 6-year-old', *Post Courier*, 20 July, p.3

<sup>53</sup> Bonney Bonsella and Clifford Faiparik, 2004 'Warning against bus rape' *The National*, 13 July, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Personal interview

<sup>55</sup> Robert Ross and Graham, L. Staines, 1972, 'The Politics of Analyzing Social Problems', *Social Problems*, Vol. 20, No. 1 p. 18, from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810174> (accessed 24/07/2009 02:09)

'the authorities will want to show: that things are generally going well ... that the problems that do exist are not the fault of the authorities or of the system but are created by aberrant behaviour of some members of the polity...'<sup>56</sup>

The consequence of this scenario therefore, is that social problems are then treated like personal problems as the relevant actors deny any fault in their system and rather blame it on individuals. In the case of rape, then, rape simply occurs not because of any problem in the system – social and cultural attitudes and other environmental factors, – but because of personal inadequacies of the victims – being alone in the house, walking alone at night, being in secluded and lonely places, not being security conscious, etc. The police, as an institutional authority, are change agents in the society and their statements rightly or wrongly made can sway public opinions and perceptions on issues.

According to Raab and Selznick, a social problem is 'any social situation which makes a substantial number of people unhappy or which seems to threaten society's ability to keep house'.<sup>57</sup> Rape in PNG is a social problem as it makes a great number of people uncomfortable. The problem of rape in the country has gone beyond the personal inadequacies of either the victim or the perpetrators. We don't often apportion blame to the victims of armed robbery or sorcery (as the current situation in the country indicates). When an armed robber takes what belongs to another person by force or under any other pretext or the sorcerer takes another person's life by whatever means, the police and the society at large do not blame the victims or excuse the perpetrators. The rapist is no different from both as he also violates another person's body and sexuality by force. Thus, we need to look for factors beyond the various reasons given by the police if we think of reducing the menace of rape. 'The sooner we recognize that fact and stop looking for endless excuses, justifications and causes for rape, the sooner we will begin the long journey towards reducing this crime'.<sup>58</sup>

### **Importance of the study**

One evident outcome of this article is that the careful collection and analysis of the verbal statements of the police as we have done can serve as a rich source of information about how the society at large perceives rape. As mentioned above, for a particular problem to take centre stage as a social problem, complex politicking is often involved. This impacts on the perception as well as how the society deals with it. Verbal statements can often reveal deeper convictions which one has about certain issues. Thus this study will be very useful in designing training and workshops aimed to help the police better understand the social nature of rape. This is important as it will impact positively on their responses to the problem of rape.

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, p. 26

<sup>57</sup> Raab E. and Selznick G. J. 1959, *Major Social Problems*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Harper and Row, New York, p. 5

<sup>58</sup> *The National*, 21 March 2006, 'Enough is Enough', p. 20

## Conclusion

In this paper we have established through statements and reports that rape in PNG is becoming prevalent, pervasive and systemic. Even though it is not the domain of this paper to explore the factors that can lead to rape in PNG, it is obvious that an amalgam of factors outside the victim make it possible. No woman ever asks to be raped. Thus despite the fact that the authorities, in this case, the police, are vociferous in their condemnation of rape, their statements and actions unfortunately reveal a misguided and confusing understanding of the social nature of rape. Their statements reflect a predilection for seeing rape more as a personal problem than as a social problem. The consequences of this mistaken attribution are that other factors that would have helped in combating the crime are overlooked.

It seems the police are obviously unaware of the cost-benefit considerations employed by rapists in the country: the benefits are often high because women and girls are easily available and the costs are relatively very low in that the level of prosecution is very low, the women are vulnerable in the first instance due to the already culturally accepted violence towards women, and then in most cases, the society might shelter them. Granted that today rapists, when prosecuted, often receive heavy sentences, but it is still a well known fact that heavy punishments do not act as deterrents to crime. We need to go beyond individual cases and identify the socio-cultural factors that make it conducive for men to rape. Until that happens, our prisons will continue to be filled up with rapists.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The writer of this article is the prison chaplain of Beon Prisons in Madang, and therefore, has first hand information about the number of rapists and their sentences in the prison.

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